



THE BEST OF

wes montgomery

**WES MONTGOMERY** made more commercial recordings later in his career, but his stature as one of the greatest and most influential of jazz guitarists rests on his Riverside recordings. These featured sympathetic small bands where Montgomery was alternatively surrounded by the empathetic organ trio he led in his native Indianapolis, his talented brothers Buddy and Monk, and the cream of the New York jazz scene. While Milt Jackson and Johnny Griffin make cameo appearances here, the bulk of the program finds Montgomery alone with a rhythm section, with a strong sampling of his innovative thumb-picking and octave techniques and a focus on hard swinging.

- 1 LOLITA** 5:13   **2 YESTERDAYS** 3:15   **3 DELILAH (take 4)** 6:08  
**4 POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS** 4:40   **5 DOUBLE DEAL** 3:47   **6 BODY AND SOUL (take 7)** 7:17  
**7 DELIRIUM** 3:37   **8 BESAME MUCHO (take 3)** 6:25   **9 ONE FOR MY BABY (AND ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD)** 7:40  
**10 TUNE UP (take 5)** 3:12   **11 FOUR ON SIX** 6:15   **12 GROOVE YARD** 2:59  
**13 FULL HOUSE** 9:06   **14 STAIRWAY TO THE STARS (take 6)** 3:36

**WES MONTGOMERY**—guitar (bass guitar on #6)

with Melvin Rhyne, George Brown, Milt Jackson, Wynton Kelly, Sam Jones, Philly Joe Jones, Tommy Flanagan, Percy Heath, Albert “Tootie” Heath, Buddy Montgomery, Monk Montgomery, George Shearing, Victor Feldman, Louis Hayes, Jimmy Cobb, Hank Jones, Ron Carter, Lex Humphries, Kenny Burrell, Johnny Griffin, and others

Original recordings produced by ORRIN KEEPNEWS

All selections are included in *Wes Montgomery: The Complete Riverside Recordings*, a 12-CD boxed set (12RCD-4408-2).

Recorded between 1959 and 1963.

Remastering, 2004—Kirk Felton (Fantasy Studios, Berkeley)

Booklet notes by Ken Dryden

AA/D/Stereo • Total Time 73:53

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R I V E R S I D E

**WES MONTGOMERY** was a self-taught guitarist who utilized his thumb instead of a pick, one of many inspired by Charlie Christian. But Montgomery was far more than a disciple of Christian's legacy; his style incorporated the use of octaves (long before it became commonplace), ear-catching chords, and brilliant single-note lines while always retaining a seemingly effortless sense of swing. It is no surprise to learn that Montgomery has been almost universally recognized by jazz musicians and critics as the most influential guitarist to emerge during the 1950s.

His first recorded appearance turns up on a 1948 broadcast by Lionel Hampton (in a band that included Charles Mingus, Teddy Buckner, Milt Buckner, and Britt Woodman). Even though he performed with the vibraphonist and a few others until 1950, Wes returned to live in Indianapolis and made no records of his own until joining his brothers, Monk and Buddy, in a family-led band during the mid-1950s.

Though Montgomery's recording career as a leader only began in 1957 and ended at his death in 1968, it is fortunate that his talent was recognized and documented by several labels, with his most valuable work done for Riverside. After Cannonball Adderley heard the guitarist playing in an after-hours club, he raved about him to Orrin Keepnews (co-founder of Riverside Records), who not only promptly signed Montgomery but recorded him often between 1959 and the demise of the label in 1964. The selections on this compact disc were compiled from his many dates as a leader or sideman for Riverside, all of which appear in the boxed set *Wes Montgomery: The Complete Riverside Recordings*.

On his very first session for his new label, Wes Montgomery was joined by organist Melvin Rhyne and drummer Paul Parker, both of whom also hailed from Indianapolis. Keepnews actually suggested "Yesterdays" to Montgomery to provide enough material to complete the guitarist's first album. The leader is the only soloist in this rather brief interpretation due to Rhyne's unfamiliarity with it. Beginning with an easygoing single-note line, Montgomery's improvisation grows increasingly intricate over Rhyne's hushed organ and Parker's steady brushwork. Jimmy Cobb takes over on drums for a 1963 follow-up meeting with Rhyne. Montgomery chooses an upbeat approach to the normally slow, mournful Latin ballad "Besame Mucho." The midtempo setting is thoroughly drenched with a blues feeling, driven by Cobb's first-rate drumming. Rhyne and drummer George Brown join Montgomery for a smoldering interpretation of Barry Harris's "Lolita," recorded

during his final session for the label. Oddly, this take was erroneously omitted from the original LP release of *Portrait of Wes* and replaced by an inferior take made during a previous studio meeting by the identical trio just seven weeks earlier.

In 1961, the Montgomery Brothers reunited to record the LP *Groove Yard* (OJC-139-2). The choice of Harold Land's "Delirium" may have been due to the guitarist's appearance on Land's *West Coast Blues!* (OJC-146-2). Monk Montgomery's adept bass solo sets the table for Wes's intense single chorus, giving way to Buddy, who plays three choruses on piano. Bobby Thomas gets in a pair of drum breaks at the conclusion. Wes was one of the first to record the late Carl Perkins's "Groove Yard" which has since become a minor standard. The quartet sets the swaggering groove, with Buddy's loping solo preceding a far more adventurous one by the guitarist.

From a session with pianist Hank Jones, bassist Ron Carter, and drummer Lex Humphries comes a mellow, uncomplicated treatment of "One for My Baby (And One for the Road)." The leader's solo dominates this track, though Jones adds a brief, effective chorus and provides flawless accompaniment. The flavor changes when pianist George Shearing joins the Montgomery Brothers, sounding much like Shearing's quintet due to the identical instrumentation. "Double Deal," possibly composed by the guitarist for this occasion, starts in a Latin groove with somewhat conservative solos by Buddy on vibes, followed by Shearing. But Wes transforms the piece with his bluesy chorus, with the quintet vamping as the piece fades out.

Victor Young's "Delilah" comes from a date jointly led by Wes Montgomery and Milt Jackson (the latter had just been signed to Riverside). Though the piece begins with an exotic air, it quickly transforms into a smoldering hard-bop setting. Jackson solos first, followed by the guitarist, who alternates between single notes and chords. Following Kelly's turn in the spotlight, Montgomery returns for one more chorus. Also from the same session is "Stairway to the Stars." Even though this is the sixth take of this standard that was attempted, it sounds as if the leaders' plan came together quickly, with a pair of Jackson's solos bracketing Montgomery's understated but effective effort.

It is tempting to say that the standard "Polka Dots and Moonbeams" was new to Montgomery, though this probably was not the case. It is more likely that it was set to a deliberate tempo to showcase his lyrical side. The excellent rhythm section includes Tommy Flanagan, Percy Heath, and Tootie Heath. Flanagan has a short piano solo, but the spotlight belongs to Montgomery. "Four on

Six," one of Montgomery's most infectious compositions, debuted during this session. It has a fascinating hook in the opening bass line that has attracted fellow musicians to it for decades. The guitarist's solo is a virtual master class for prospective students as he subtly alters his approach to the theme with each chorus, the rhythm section chugging along like a slightly hip train. His fills back Flanagan's solo, then Percy Heath takes over the bluesy head to further develop it. Tootie Heath adds a brief drum break before the quartet returns to the head.

Coleman Hawkins's legendary 1939 record of "Body and Soul" helped make Johnny Green's best-known composition a favorite among jazz musicians. Montgomery throws his fans a bit of a curve by switching to a bass guitar. But by concentrating on its upper range, the sound he achieves is not strikingly different. Joining him is Cannonball Adderley's rhythm section (Victor Feldman, Sam Jones, Louis Hayes), plus flutist James Clay.

When a jazz artist adds strings to a date, there is often a temptation for many critics and fans to label it as a purely commercial venture. But arranger and conductor Jimmy Jones (noted for his work with Ella Fitzgerald and Sarah Vaughan, among others) comes up with a swinging chart of Miles Davis's "Tune Up" that will coax anyone to snap his fingers along with the music. The rhythm section includes pianist Dick Hyman, bassist Milt Hinton, and drummer Osie Johnson, though Wes is the lone soloist.

Montgomery's "Full House" comes from his sole live recording for Riverside. According to producer Orrin Keepnews, Montgomery did not have a working trio at the time, but he was comfortable playing with Miles Davis's rhythm section (Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, Jimmy Cobb), while tenor saxophonist Johnny Griffin was an old friend. This track is the highlight of their productive 1962 live set at Tsubo's in Berkeley.

For many buyers, the purchase of *The Best of Wes Montgomery* will likely be their introduction to his work. Don't be surprised if you eventually buy the individual CDs from which this anthology was assembled or the massive boxed set that leaves no stone unturned in examining the late guitarist's enduring legacy from his Riverside years.

—KEN DRYDEN (May 2004)

# WES MONTGOMERY GUITAR

(BASS GUITAR ON #6)

## 1 LOLITA (Barry Harris) Orpheum Music-BMI 5:13

with **Melvin Rhyne**—organ; **George Brown**—drums.

Recorded November 27, 1963. Originally released on *Wes Montgomery: The Complete Riverside Recordings* (12RCD-4408-2).

## 2 YESTERDAYS (Kern-Harbach) Universal Polygram Int'l.-ASCAP 3:15

with **Melvin Rhyne**—organ; **Paul Parker**—drums.

Recorded October 6, 1959. From *The Wes Montgomery Trio* (Riverside 1156/OJCCD-034-2).

## 3 DELILAH (take 4) (Victor Young) Famous Music-ASCAP 6:08

with **Milt Jackson**—vibes; **Wynton Kelly**—piano; **Sam Jones**—bass; **Philly Joe Jones**—drums.

Recorded December 19, 1961. From *Milt Jackson and Wes Montgomery: Bags Meets Wes!* (Riverside 9407/OJCCD-234-2).

[Wynton Kelly appears courtesy of Vee-Jay Records].

## 4 POLKA DOTS AND MOONBEAMS (Van Heusen-Burke) Bourne Co./Limerick Music/Mark Music/My Dad's Songs/Reganesque Music-ASCAP 4:40

with **Tommy Flanagan**—piano; **Percy Heath**—bass; **Albert "Tootie" Heath**—drums.

Recorded January 28, 1960. From *The Incredible Jazz Guitar of Wes Montgomery* (Riverside 1169/OJCCD-036-2).

## 5 DOUBLE DEAL (Wes Montgomery) Taggie Music-BMI 3:47

with **Buddy Montgomery**—vibes; **George Shearing**—piano; **Monk Montgomery**—bass; **Walter Perkins**—drums.

Recorded October 9, 1961. From *George Shearing and the Montgomery Brothers* (Jazzland 955/OJCCD-040-2).

[George Shearing appears courtesy of Capitol Records].

## 6 BODY AND SOUL (take 7) (Heyman-Sour-Eyton-Green) WB Music/Range Road Music/Quartet Music-ASCAP/Drumopetal Music-BMI 7:17

with **James Clay**—flute; **Victor Feldman**—piano; **Sam Jones**—bass; **Louis Hayes**—drums.

Recorded October 12, 1960. From *Movin' Along* (Riverside 9342/OJCCD-089-2).

## 7 DELIRIUM (Harold Land) Contemporary Music-BMI 3:37

with **Buddy Montgomery**—piano; **Monk Montgomery**—bass; **Bobby Thomas**—drums.

Recorded January 3, 1961. From *The Montgomery Brothers: Groove Yard* (Riverside 9362/OJCCD-139-2).

## 8 BESAME MUCHO (take 3) (Consuelo Velasquez) Peer International Corp.-BMI 6:25

with **Melvin Rhyne**—organ; **Jimmy Cobb**—drums.

Recorded April 22, 1963. From *Boss Guitar* (Riverside 9459/OJCCD-261-2).

## 9 ONE FOR MY BABY (AND ONE MORE FOR THE ROAD) (Arlen-Mercer) Harwin Music-ASCAP 7:40

with **Hank Jones**—piano; **Ron Carter**—bass; **Lex Humphries**—drums.

Recorded August 4, 1961. From *So Much Guitar!* (Riverside 9382/OJCCD-233-2).

## 10 TUNE UP (take 5) (Miles Davis) Prestige Music-BMI 3:12

with **Phil Bodner**—woodwinds; **Dick Hyman**—piano; **Kenny Burrell**—rhythm guitar; **Milt Hinton**—bass; **Osie**

**Johnson**—drums; plus **Margaret Rose**—harp; **Gene Orloff** (concertmaster), **Harry Lookofsky**, **David Nadien**, **Winston Collymore**, **Mac Ceppos**, **Isadore Zir**, **Sam Rand**, **Sylvan Shulman**, **Paul Winter**—violins; **Ralph Hersh**, **Burt Fisch**—violins; **Lucien Schmit**, **Kermit Moore**—cellos; **Jimmy Jones**—arranger, conductor.

Recorded April 19, 1963. From *Wes Montgomery with Strings: Fusion!* (Riverside 9472/OJCCD-368-2).

## 11 FOUR ON SIX (Montgomery) Taggie-BMI 6:15

same as #4, except recorded January 26, 1960.

## 12 GROOVE YARD (Carl Perkins) Second Floor Music-BMI 2:59

same as #7.

## 13 FULL HOUSE (Montgomery) Taggie-BMI 9:06

with **Johnny Griffin**—tenor saxophone; **Wynton Kelly**—piano; **Paul Chambers**—bass; **Jimmy Cobb**—drums.

Recorded June 25, 1962. From *Full House* (Riverside 9434/OJCCD-106-2).

## 14 STAIRWAY TO THE STARS (take 6) (Malneck-Signorelli-Parish) EMI Robbins Catalog-ASCAP/EMI

Blackwood Music-BMI 3:36

same as #3, except recorded December 18, 1961.

### Original recordings produced by ORRIN KEEPNEWS

All selections are included in *Wes Montgomery: The Complete Riverside Recordings*, a 12-CD boxed set (12RCD-4408-2).

Recorded by Ray Fowler at Plaza Sound Studios, New York City (except #2, 4, 11 by Jack Higgins at Reeves Sound Studios, New York City; #5, 6 by Wally Heider at United Recording Studios, Los Angeles; #13 recorded in performance by Wally Heider at Tsubo, Berkeley).

Remastering, 2004—Kirk Felton  
(Fantasy Studios, Berkeley)

Art direction—Jamie Putnam • Photography—Don Schlitten

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